Peter G. Coleman and Ann O'Hanlon. *Ageing and Development*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

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RÉSUMÉ

Aging as a Social Process est un ouvrage exhaustif qui vise à élucider les aspects physiologiques, psychologiques et sociaux du vieillissement et à établir des liens entre ces aspects, mais qui met essentiellement l'accent sur les processus sociaux liés aux expériences individuelles et à la force des structures sociales. L'ouvrage a été mis à jour et bonifié afin de tenir compte de la diversité croissante en matière de vieillissement et d'aînés ainsi que de la croissance concomitante dans le domaine de la recherche. L'approche qui consiste à envisager ces enjeux en fonction d'un cycle de vie, et à faire fait état de la diversité des expériences vécues par des individus qui passent à travers les différentes étapes de la vie en étant exposés à différents contextes historiques et culturels, permet d'établir des liens entre les nombreux sujets abordés dans ce texte. Ce livre est fortement recommandé pour les étudiants qui suivent des cours de sociologie du vieillissement, d'introduction à la gérontologie ou d'autres cours connexes. Il s'agit également d'un ouvrage de référence utile pour les personnes qui mènent des recherches ou pour les professionnels qui prennent part à l'élaboration de politiques ou de programmes ciblant les personnes âgées d'aujourd'hui ou de demain.

More researchers are searching the later stages of the lifespan for evidence of continued development. In addition, positive psychology has largely succeeded in making the case that research on positive aspects of health and well-being is at least as important as studies of pathology. Both these forces have strengthened the focus on positive development in adulthood and aging, until it can be argued that normative expectations for aging are for high levels of subjective well-being, functional competence, and autonomy. Consequently, can we now answer Baltes's (1990) question as to what are the limits of optimal aging.

Coleman and O'Hanlon accurately state that their work is not the usual reader in aging and development. Their explicit assumption is that in a reflected-upon life, old age, including in the age of frailty, can still be a meaningful and positive part of the lifespan. With this orientation, they present a constructive approach to human aging, which emphasizes the psychological processes and the social contexts that contribute to emotional, social, and spiritual development in aging. The authors specifically exclude consideration of the physical and psychological deterioration per se that can occur in old age. These negative developmental constraints are discussed only with regard to the challenges that they present to resilient adaptation in old age.

The first section of the book ostensibly focuses on normative developmental models of aging, mainly theories with a psychodynamic basis that emphasize developmental stages and life tasks. As was to be expected, the work of Jung, Erikson, and Levinson is discussed. The presentation is sympathetic, but as the authors themselves admit, these theories, despite the wide-ranging interest they have generated, are still short of substantial research support. Further, again as the authors acknowledge, these theories tend to be viewed as ideal models of adult development and, in the absence of research evidence, are likely to be characterized as prescriptive not descriptive. Coleman and O'Hanlon point out that the hermeneutical approach frequently employed in this type of study can, at best, capture some interesting patterns, not necessarily normative ones. Then why label these models *normative developmental patterns*? This question is particularly salient when reading the qualitative shifts postulated in the gero-transcendence model of Tornstam (1999). This model postulates a meta-perspective shift in old age from a materialistic and pragmatic view of the world to a cosmic and transcendent one. Tornstam's theorizing clearly is more aspiration than evidence-based conceptual development. As such, it provides an example of what Coleman and O'Hanlon mention elsewhere – how positive expectations of aging, implicitly demanding serenity regardless of life circumstances, can be as cruel as negative expectations of aging.

Coleman and O'Hanlon follow up their opening theoretical section with a chapter focusing on specific areas of research, in which they describe recent findings in generativity, wisdom, and reminiscence. The authors present succinct summaries of the research in these areas, emphasizing the development of multi-methodologies and critically evaluating the research evidence in these areas. Their critical discussion highlights the absence of representative samples, with an overemphasis in the research on findings

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based on self-selected, highly motivated participants, especially in the area of reminiscence. Reminiscence serves a variety of functions and reminiscence researchers have developed functional categorizations, ranging from reminiscence that serves to prepare for death to reminiscence that reduces boredom or reminiscence that can be described as simple narration. However, understandably, most researchers focus their efforts on the most interesting aspects of reminiscence and autobiographical memories and study different types of personal memories, including those leading to integrative self-efforts, and the creative processes involved in deriving meaningful life stories.

The middle section of the book focuses on theories of adaptation in aging, with discussions of the current, well-known research generated by the Baltes's (1990) SOC model and the contributions of Brandtstädter (Brandtstädter, Rothermund, & Schmitz, 1998), Heckhausen (Heckhausen & Dweck, 1998), and Carstensen (Carstensen, Isaaciwitz, & Charles, 1999). These theories and the research they have generated have had a profound impact on views of aging by elucidating the continuing and, in some areas, improved, processes that help sustain subjective well-being in the context of increasingly negative biological changes. More unusual is the inclusion of attachment theory. Coleman and O'Hanlon discuss Crittenden's (2000) model of adult development, attempts to classify adults into three patterns of attachment based on research into childhood, and the measures developed to classify adult attachment. The model is scant on evidence and has not generated much research.

Again, the section on the discussion of large theories is followed by presentations of specific research themes in the study of adaptation. The focus here is on the protective role of social relations, attitudes toward aging, and the development of personal meaning and spirituality as processes of adaptation. Coleman and O'Hanlon provide an interesting discussion on the conflicting results of studies examining the role of religious and spiritual beliefs in adaptation to aging, including those studies reporting the absence of beneficial effects and the presence of harmful effects on physical and psychological well-being. The authors make a telling point, recognizing the importance of diversity in studying the impact of significant beliefs. Thus, they argue that the most appropriate control for studies of the effects of religion is to include people who are indifferent to religion and those who hold other beliefs, not only to include individuals with varying degrees of religious beliefs. Further, in view of the current high prevalence of religious beliefs and church membership in the United States, generalizations from American research to other, less faith-oriented countries should be made with due caution.

Finally, an examination of the increasingly prevalent stage of advanced old age, which is almost inevitably frail old age, makes up the last section of the book. As the authors rightly point out, this last life stage can now be considered a normal part of life. The authors argue that, even in this last life stage, with far from optimal conditions for autonomous functioning and continuing self-development, adaptation and coping can occur. Here, the potential stigmatizing effects of the concept of successful aging are most evident, when attempts to meet criteria that emphasize what individuals can do to maintain, use, or even improve their capacities (Rowe, 2002) overwhelmingly result in failure. Coleman and O'Hanlon illustrate the concept of resilience in old age with research demonstrating the importance of sense of control even within very small domains and, seemingly paradoxically, how giving up control can also be beneficial for very old people in institutional settings.

There are many admirable features in this work by Coleman and O'Hanlon. They provide a good integration of North American and European research, including some lesser-known studies that deserve more attention – for example, the innovative work of Thomae (1976). There are also well-integrated, critical, and stimulating discussions of research themes and developmental concepts – for example, reminiscence. Their including the life stage of advanced old age and their advocating that we recognize unique ways of adaptating to the limitations of this stage are also worthy of attention.

A jarring note, however, is the omission of any consideration of the impact of socio-economic conditions on development in aging. The index does not list *money*, *income*, *pensions*, or *socio-economic factors*. Research (see for example, Argyle, 1999) has demonstrated that money can't buy much subjective well-being, but it appears to have more effect on happiness at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. The assumption that old people possess the resilience and capacities to adapt successfully to the social and biological constraints of aging should at least consider the influence of reduced financial circumstances. This is particularly salient when there are pension alarms and crises in many nations and the global forces that effect economic transformation leave old people

behind. The omission of economic constraints in aging can lead the reader to believe that, once again, poor old people have been omitted from consideration and we are reading about research into middle-class aging.

In many ways, the presentation of a positive emphasis in aging is desirable and accords well with the current zeitgeist of aging, but Coleman and O'Hanlon's determinedly positive approach can lead to simplistic assumptions. An example is their argument that dementia, by leading to an acknowledgement of dependency in a previously distant spouse, can strengthen the marital bond. Recent findings that spousal caregivers are more likely to be abusive than non-spousal caregivers (Beach et al., 2005) suggest this is unlikely and do not support such facile optimism. Further, although the authors note that positive expectations for successful aging can put unrealistic demands on old people, their categorization of models of ideal aging (models that have received little research support) as normative developmental models does not encourage a realistic appraisal of actual development in aging. Their acknowledgement that these models have received inadequate support from rigorous testing makes such a categorization even more puzzling and lends credence to the critical view that such theorizing does not extend beyond inspirational prescriptions.

The authors' explicit focus on the developmental changes and processes characterizing the older life stages also leads to a neglect of the abundant research demonstrating significant and long-lasting continuity in major psychological dimensions, such as personality traits. Such neglect may possibly be acceptable within the scope of the book, but Coleman and O'Hanlon also explicitly acknowledge the importance of individual differences and diversity in aging. Thus, these differences are acknowledged but the dominant emphasis on qualitative-stage approaches leads to their ignoring research that demonstrates that important psychological functions vary more across individuals than across ages. Their one discussion of continuity across the lifespan, an attempt to link child and adult development on the basis of attachment theory, is of questionable merit.

All in all, this reviewer believes that the authors have had varying success in meeting the goals of the book. *Ageing and Development* is well written, has an engaging style, is always interesting, and has an admirable reflective approach to the area. Some research areas are very well discussed and provide grounds for optimism about the potential limits of aging. The book, however, leaves a lingering sense of some grand developmental theories and models that are, even after many years, inadequately tested and likely to remain so. At present, their status probably can be best described as, to quote Hemingway (1926, p. 247), ''Isn't it pretty to think so.''

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